



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS

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Law Enforcement Update

Risks & Consequences: Keeping Up With Wireless Device Safety

Wireless telephones and other devices are everywhere – and there’s no doubt that they have made Texans’ lives more convenient. Cell phones have even helped save lives. Peace officers respond to innumerable calls citizens make from their cars or remote places where land lines are not available. While improved communication makes everyone more accessible, it does not come without risk – especially to young Texans.

Recent studies indicate that more than 40 percent of 8- to 12-year-olds – and almost three quarters of children between the ages of 13 and 17 – have wireless devices. As minors’ cell phone usage continues to increase, it is increasingly important that parents understand potential safety concerns.

The Office of the Attorney General (OAG) works tirelessly to keep children safe from sexual predators. The OAG’s Cyber Crimes and Fugitive units work closely with local law enforcement officers to track down fugitive sex offenders and child pornographers. Cyber Crimes officers also criss-cross the state speaking to students and parents about Internet and wireless communication safety. Some of the dangers related to wireless devices include:

Inappropriate content. Most current wireless devices have Internet-browsing and text-messaging capabilities. Many parents carefully monitor their kids' Internet usage at home, so they should take the same precautions with their children's cell phones. Web sites with harmful or inappropriate content can be easily accessed from cell phones. Parents should be encouraged to carefully evaluate whether to enable Web browsing or text messaging on their child's telephone. Most cell phone carriers offer both free and fee-based services that allow parents to restrict browsing or texting.

Child predators. As with Internet-based e-mail, chat or instant messaging, text messaging can be used to persuade young Texans to reveal personal information or lure them into meeting a stranger. Kids should be taught not to respond to strangers' messages – or any messages that make them uncomfortable – and they should be told to inform their parents if they receive any messages from strangers. Children should NEVER give out personal information or set up a meeting with someone they do not know.

Cyber-bullying. Unfortunately, some children are using modern technology to “cyber-bully,” which means using Internet chat, Web pages and cell-phone texting to intimidate, embarrass or hurt others. Often, cyber-bullying occurs among peers, but in some cases even teachers and other authority figures are targeted. Cyber-bullying can leave its victims with decreased self-esteem or feelings of fear, depression and anger. In some cases, cyber-bullying places its victims in real danger, especially if it provokes violence.

Young Texans should never tolerate cyber-bullying. Children who receive or discover intimidating or harmful messages, should notify a trusted adult immediately.

Sharing or posting inappropriate photos. According to a recent study, 20 percent of 13- to 19-year-olds have electronically posted or sent naked or semi-naked photos of themselves. This startling phenomenon reflects the need for parents to make sure their children realize that these messages or photos may:

- Get forwarded to others or posted on the Internet;
- Raise the expectation of sexual activity, potentially putting the young sender in uncomfortable or dangerous situations;
- Cause embarrassment and legal or employment problems for parents and family members;
- Result in suspensions from school or athletic participation; or
- Hinder future attempts to get into college, receive scholarships or gain employment.

Parents, law enforcement officers and others who have questions or want more information about protecting children should visit the OAG's Web site, www.texasattorneygeneral.gov. Together, we must work to teach young Texans and keep them safe from harm.